

So Call It What You Want

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So Call It What You Want

by [mushroomcow69](#)

Summary

George and Clay have been successfully hiding their relationship for all four years of college.

Surely one senior trip won't change anything, right?

Or,

George and Dream try to survive a lengthy vacation with all of their friends, without getting

caught. It doesn't work.

Notes

HELLO!

so, this was a fucking nightmare. to give you a window into writing this fic, my ocd decided that i couldn't write any part of this fic unless it was immediately perfect, and my adhd decided i couldn't write any part of this fic. its been a long and torturous process, and im still not happy with it, but i dont think i ever will be so please take my child. teach him how to fly. tell him i love him.

if you guys are used to reading my stuff, you know that everything i post is usually like, shitty oneshots written in one night. i've never been able to finish a long term project due to my severe adhd, and i haven't worked this hard on a piece since my eighth grade creative writing final. so, this fic is very special to me. please be nice to my child. but also, get it the fuck out of my face. take it. i never wanna see it again.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

George had undeniably found *his people* when he'd hopped a 5AM JetBlue and walked through the doors of college. He'd found his crowd, family, home, whatever you want to call it. He'd found the people he could stay up playing Mario Kart with until the PA was banging down the door, the people he could nosedive, utterly hammered, into pools with when the security guard had gone to sleep. And frankly, he couldn't be sure if that was a good thing or not.

Because finding somewhere that felt *like home* was great, but with that also came the discovery of *someone* who felt like home.

George and Clay met the second week of freshman year, in the welcome lecture of the fifteenth identical math course that day. George had just gotten to the point of adjusting where he'd relaxed, where he'd assumed that he'd met everyone he was going to meet, and then in waltzed *Clay*. In waltzed a green-eyed, star quarterback, Hallmark wet dream, and George was *absolutely whipped*.

The welcome lecture was, as most first classes are, full of icebreakers and mundane name games. And if George wasn't already crushing, the deal was sealed when Clay, in Mathematical Literacy II, declared his favorite subject to be Mathematical Illiteracy.

Anyone that's ever been to a high school knows that a math class is basically the ideal flirting domain. Equations are the pinnacle of wingmen; if they were a student, they'd be the designated driver of every party. For the better part of freshman year, Clay and George learned absolutely zilch, with light giggles and flushed cheeks weaving into the wind that slipped past the hems of their sweatshirts. And as the leaves yellowed and fell, they too danced around each other, blissfully powerless to the air that moved them, but enjoying the ride far too much to object.

It was a chill October night when the leaves finally fell to the pavement, landing wordlessly on seasonal wrappers and cigarette butts. The nameless game they'd been playing had, until then, not left the walls of Lecture Hall D. But with the first holiday of the year came the first party of the

year, and with red solo cups and dimmed lights came a boldness far beyond the confines of schoolyard flirting.

There's always something strange about seeing someone in their natural state, outside of the tailored environment you associate them with, and Clay found himself almost shocked that the mystifying, intangible boy actually *existed* beyond the campus gates.

Clay remembered, with a surprising clarity, locking eyes with George as he waded into the sea of drunk frat boys, a second of pointed eye contact that plummeted tumultuously straight to the bottom of his stomach. Somewhere, through the haze of beer pong and awful music, Clay and George had found themselves on the floor of a closet, illuminated only by the sharp blue and green of their glow stick bracelets, right on the precipice of imperceptible yells and muffled music. Clay remembers the ethereal slap to the face that was George, that close, cheeks flushed and pupils wide, the LED painting shadows across his face. He remembers the feeling of something *snapping*, of something *exploding*, and he remembers the blur that is the rest of that night, smudged in deep blues and desperate touches. He remembers feeling all the tension, the endless flirting, all the cheeky glances and blushed laughs, combust between their lips, leaving them stumbling blindly through dorm hallways, feverishly slamming doors and pulling off clothes through drunken giggles.

And as Mathematical Literacy II turned to Pre-Calc, a one night stand turned to much, much more.

Rom-com cliché that it is, Clay *was* actually the star quarterback, and high school football was a petri dish of testosterone with superiority complexes. So, they decided to keep it a secret. It just wasn't worth the hassle, wasn't worth the risk of uprooting the individual lives they'd worked so hard to settle into. And they'd never admit it, but there was a certain thrill to secrecy. The prickling adrenaline rush of brushing past each other in the halls, the sultry knowledge that hickeys and scratches lay just below the thin fabric of a football jersey, the intoxicating mischief of stolen kisses in bathroom stalls and behind bleachers.

Maybe it was out of determination, or maybe out of a secret enjoyment, that Clay and George managed to keep their relationship a secret all four years of college. It was giddy and thrilling, sometimes exhausting and torturous, but it was the reality they wanted, and God, was it worth it.

Compared to four years, one senior trip was nothing. Sure, there was the added dimension of privacy, or lack thereof, but they'd made it this far, and there was no way they were going to skip the *senior trip*. Whoever thought of putting an entire class of college students in a Minnesota Lodge for two weeks must have been off their ass, as the aforementioned students would definitely soon be. It was the final stretch; two weeks of secrecy amongst chaotic joint living, and then they'd done it. They will have gotten through all of college without leaving the closet. And what an accomplishment that would be.

Rutgers Winter Lodge lay foggily beneath a thick blanket of atmosphere. The entire land screamed *Little House on the Prairie* winter, a muddle of brick fireplaces and gingham couches. There was a main building resembling a hotel straight out of *Dead Poets Society*, with an extensive pool and cafeteria, offset by grand rugs and cozy leather couches. Scattered on the outskirts of the hotel, bordered by fallen snow and yellow lights, were a collection of small wooden cabins. The hotel wasn't *really* a hotel, having very few actual bedrooms, so they were to sleep in pairs in the cabins. It was almost a tiny village, a cliché slice of normality with its connecting dirt paths and guiding lampposts. Every person was within walking distance during the night, and guaranteed to be

nearby during the day.

It was the *coolest thing ever* for a gaggle of giddy college students, but a recipe for disaster for a secret college relationship. In theory, it couldn't have been *that hard* to contain themselves for two weeks. But, in practice, they were hopelessly lovestruck, irrefutably horny adolescents.

George found himself begrudgingly coming to such a realization as he sat on an unmade bed, held only by the sharp winter moonlight. He could hear Alex snoring lightly in the bed beside him. If he squinted hard enough, he could almost make out his splayed figure, donning the beanie he refused to remove even in sleep. George suddenly found the air outside his window far too loud, the stagnant darkness around his shoulders deafening. He wanted nothing more than to slip under the crappy lodge blanket and surrender to it, but every atom surrounding him felt hollow. He could almost feel the ghost of a body around his, the familiar skin on his that he was so desperately trying, and failing, not to yearn for.

It wasn't just that he missed Clay, he wasn't *clingy*. But he was used to falling asleep beside him, used to waking up to his voice. It had been a while since he felt the sting of darkness without Clay's broad shoulders there to block it. And, in the smudged logic of Freezing Minnesota 3 AM, nothing could possibly be more important than soothing that sting.

So, he snuck past a sleeping Quackity, slipped on his shoes, and winced at the creak of the old wooden door before stepping off the porch in nothing but his pajamas, and setting off.

The walk itself was shrouded in the crunch of dried snow and the bounce of forbidden moonlight against grass. George found himself caught between paranoia and tranquility. The entire situation *screamed* horror movie cliché; young gay all alone in the middle of the woods at night. But he wasn't scared, which he supposed really only added to the horror movie cliché. He was shivering uncontrollably, cheeks red and nose numb, and he didn't even want to *think* about what would happen if he were caught outside his cabin past curfew, but he wasn't scared. He couldn't be, not with the low rumble of crickets and gentle buzz of lampposts, not with the knowledge of who he was walking to.

Frankly, even if he was scared, he'd walk to him anyway.

George could only pray that he was at the right cabin as he shuffled up the porch, fluttering his hands before rapping on the wooden door frame. Luckily, Clay had drawn the short stick and ended up the only one without a roommate, but god only knows how George would ever explain to Karl and Sapnap why he's at their door in his pajamas at fuck all O'clock.

He heard distant rustling before a *click* sounded from behind the door, opening only enough for a tired green eye to peek through from behind a tousle of familiar bedhead.

"George? Wh' the fuck are y'doing here," Clay slurred lowly, letting the door fall open.

And George saw his beautiful boyfriend, eyes lidded, stance clouded by sleep, and realized *just how much* longer a day apart had felt. And before he could stop himself, he was pushing past the front door, gripping Clay's face with the strength of a thousand men, and kissing *the shit* out of him.

And that was it. And if he wasn't tethered to reality by the frozen breeze, George could've sworn he'd see the blur of blue LED lights and gin-stained lips. And, sure, they were risking *everything*, but Clay's hands beat apprehension in the race to George's chest, and *oh God* was there one hell of a thrill to secrecy.

Clay stumbled back as his eyebrows flew up, bringing George with him through the doorway, kept upright only by the lock of their lips. The cabin was shadowed in deep blues and sharp silhouettes, the same clandestinity that he'd felt on the walk over. Tripping over each other's feet, George found himself feverishly pushed against the now closing front door, held by his shoulders and smothered in heavy breaths.

"George," Clay breathed. He hadn't broken away for more than a second before he was running back for more, jutting his neck out to keep kissing even as he pulled back bitterly, "We could get caught--"

"I don't care."

They were stumbling back again, and George's fingers trailed down, toying nimbly with the hem of Clay's sweatpants.

"Eager?" Clay teased, leaning his forehead against George's.

"Missed you," was all he got in response as a slender finger hooked between nylon strings and pulled gently. The knot came undone with a single tug, and so did George, finding himself against a scratchy fleece duvet with blonde hair falling into his eyes. Clay raked the strands back impatiently, taking the opportunity to look into George's eyes, to read the expressions he was so fluent in. And they were on the same page. Of course they were on the same page, because they were *always* on the same page. Because getting caught was tomorrow's problem, and tonight laid a banquet of soft skin and rough touches. And Clay was nothing if not gluttonous.

The next morning came with sleepy confusion and wide-eyed realizations, the yellowed winter sun rising as George jumped from the warmth of Clay's arms and ignored the yearning that followed him from the bed. He scurried to pull back the curtains, squinting at bright, frosted windows before muttering a "*shit*" under his breath.

"Babe?" Clay's voice was slurred with sleep, and George had to remind himself not to instinctively *awwww*.

"Clay."

"Come back to bed," George looked to the tangled sheets to see a nest of blonde hair burrow adamantly into a pillow.

"*Clay*."

The blonde flipped over bitterly, leaning on his arms, and George watched as green eyes flitted across the room, disoriented, before landing on an open suitcase and flying open.

"*Oh shit*."

"Yeah."

The eyes darted to George and back before Clay slid a hand down his face dejectedly, "We," he dug his fingers into his temples, "Did we..."

"Yep," George huffed in bemusement.

“Fuck,” Clay groaned, rubbing the fingers back and forth like it would help him think. “Well, it’s what, like six in the morning? No one we know wakes up until *at least* noon,”

George scanned the room before trotting back over, “Love, I’m rooming with Alex. If he wakes up and I’m not there, we’re fucked,” he leaned down beside the bed, plucking his sweatpants from the floor and pulling them on haphazardly.

Clay breathed a tired sigh and flipped his legs out from under him, resting his feet on the cabin floor, “Okay, you’re right.”

“I always am,” George quipped through a smirk.

“You,” Clay lazily pointed a finger, “should stop talking if you want me to let you go back to your cabin.”

George, never one to back down from a tease-off, donned an innocent smile, “Sorry, can’t take you seriously when your dick is out.”

“You love it when my dick is out,” Clay retorted.

“I love it when your dick is *in*.”

Clay fell silent before choking on a wheeze, running his hand over his face.

“Oh my god,” he scoffed incredulously, “Get the fuck out of my cabin.”

George tugged on his shirt, chuckling as he walked to the door, “You know you love me.”

“I do,” he surrendered fondly, walking to George and kissing him lightly, “be careful.”

George smiled against Clay’s forehead, “I know.”

Shivering violently at the sudden rush of winter air, George stepped through the door and began to jog through the snow, dawn emerging languidly behind him.

As much as he wanted to wallow in the creeping panic, or in the sharp cold that pricked at his fingertips, George couldn’t deny how irrefutably *pretty* it was; The rubber of his shoes crunched weakly against the ground before falling in, leaving gentle craters in their wake as the hotel floodlights and lampposts sat stagnant and tranquil. The entire walk was shrouded in poetic lonesomeness, in the feeling of dawn that you overlook in the moment but miss once the world wakes.

George couldn’t help but think of how much Clay would *love* this, how his pale cheeks would turn pink against the ivory of the snow. How he’d probably get that surrendered little smile on his face and do something stupid, like jumping headfirst into the freezing ground and bringing George with him, succumbing to a nuclear splash of white flurries. It was the moments like this, the moments of enigmatic solitude, that Clay always managed to fill with stupid glee. Clay was the other half of George’s alone, the exception to his seclusion, the covert late night excursions to his *shy british star student*.

George felt almost evil leaving his patterned footprints on the porch, disturbing the quiet peace of freshly fallen snow and sleepy silence. But nonetheless, he pulled off his shoes and ever so cautiously tip-toed through the frosted threshold into the cabin.

It was the closing of the door that got him, the malicious *thump* that the wood made against the frame. He knew it as soon as it happened too, lip flying between his teeth, eyes squeezing shut as he held his breath and prayed not to get caught. But he was not so lucky, if the weakly annoyed groan that met him was anything to go by.

“Why the *fuck* are you awake right now,” Alex slurred almost imperceptibly into his pillow.

George was still frozen, eyes flying around the dark room like a believable excuse would materialize onto the dusty wooden shelves.

“Are you fucking coming in? Where the fuck are you coming in from at six am,” Alex had flipped over now and was staring dazedly at George with his cheek pressed against the pillow.

“I went for a walk.”

Alex seemed to consider this for a second before evidently deciding it was *far too early* for this shit, and flipping back into the pillow face first. “That’s fuckin’ weird, man.”

Alex didn’t see the sigh of relief that wracked its way down George’s spine, already asleep before he had finished mumbling the sentence.

The hotel lounge was, as George discovered after a few hours of sitting silently on his bed, quite literally something out of Harry Potter. Granted, really the whole place was, but the lounge, upholstered in gingham armchairs and netted fireplaces, overflowing with scrawny college boys at Eleven AM on a Saturday, went above and beyond.

It was exactly what you’d expect it to be; Wilbur and Technoblade watching wistfully as Tommy and Tubbo, the two freshman who’d somehow managed to book a spot, tried to fish riches out of the couch cushions, Karl and Alex taking turns trying to hit trinkets off the fireplace with a stationary-made slingshot. And then there was the stained little table, at which Sapnap, Clay, and Bad sat, arguing impetuously over *something*. Sapnap slammed his fists against the flimsy wood as Bad’s eyebrows furrowed incredulously, and George couldn’t stop himself from sneaking a glance at Clay, whose feet were rested lazily on the table, arms crossed with an amused smirk.

George blinked stubbornly, about to shake his head and go attempt to referee Karl and Alex when Clay looked back, yellow eyes twinkling beneath the lamp-light.

It was hard, he wouldn’t deny that. He couldn’t deny that. It was fucking hard, especially in moments like these, when all he wanted to do was *kiss his boyfriend*. Moments when Clay just sat there, looking so painfully *Clay-like*, and George was a breath away from saying fuck it, from running across the room and claiming what was *his*. But even those moments, even the moments when George felt his stomach turn to a creaky, dry cog trying desperately to turn against friction that wasn’t there, were euphoric. It was all euphoric, and as much as he *knew* that neither of them were ready yet, as cheesy and disgusting as it was, he’d keep fantasizing about a day when he could hold Clay in front of everyone. When he could show them all who he’d found, what *he had* and they didn’t.

George tried to stop himself from blushing and shot Clay a sheepish smile across the room, the cacophony that was their friends shielding them from the spotlight, wrapping around them like a

thin veil. Clay gave a bashful wink in response. And that was it. Hours and hours spent together flowed between their eyes for just a second, and it was almost miraculous that no else could see it. That all the sunrises and midnight walks didn't shine through their skin like a flare, giving them away immediately.

But they didn't. Miraculously, no light radiated from them, and they were just college students. Just two boys that *happened* to be in the same room, *happened* to share the same friends. Just two boys who *hadn't* seen every inch of each other's skin, who *hadn't* broken through every crack in each other's disguises. Just two boys.

"How'd I know you'd be back tonight," was the self-satisfied jeer that met George when he ventured out of snowy darkness and rapped his knuckles on familiar splintered wood.

"Like you weren't sitting by the door waiting for me," he retorted, casually shuffling into the cabin.

"You did take a while."

George chuckled, slipping off his wet sneakers, "Had to wait for Q to go to sleep. I swear that man is a bottomless void of energy- he was singing some Backstreet Boys bullshit at like, two AM."

"My favorite genre of music," Clay stuck his head out the door, making sure no one had seen George come in, "*Backstreet Boys Bullshit.*"

George hummed in agreement as Clay closed the door, wrapping his arms around familiar hips.

"I missed you," he mumbled into George's neck, brunette hair barely tickling his lips.

George brought his hands down to grab the arms that enveloped his waist, "I missed you too. Alex kept trying to get me to go sneak beers from the food hall and pull an all nighter or some shit. I just wanted to see my boyfriend."

"Did you, now," Clay teased smugly.

"No, Clay," George lolled his head back, "I'm here because I *don't* want to see you."

Clay snickered, leaning in to nip at a pale earlobe, "Well, you can go then, Georgie."

George scoffed and broke away, walking towards the bed, "Shut up."

Clay caught up and looked at George, an all too familiar glint of mischief in his eyes. George scoffed again and rolled his eyes dramatically.

"Don't you dare-"

"Make me," Clay interrupted, an amused smile breaking across his face.

"Oh my god," George let out a resigned huff, "I think you got it backwards, that's usually your job."

“Is it,” the blonde retorted, the smirk on his face betraying that he did, in fact, already know the answer to that question. George only hummed contentedly.

“Tell me,” Clay badgered on, breath hot against George’s neck, leaving smirk-shaped marks on his skin. Silence fell, heavy and gelatinous, over the room.

“Make me.”

The door was creaking.

George had woken before the sun, walked the familiar snowy path back to his cabin, and when he went to sneak in, the door was creaking.

Not that the door hadn’t been creaking before, it *was* an old Minnesota cabin, but this was the kind of creak that would make you nervous when you were a kid. That would make you freeze on the stairs for twenty minutes until you were positive your parents were still asleep.

George had already gotten caught sneaking back in last night, and as stupid as Quackity was, he was a smart guy. He had a Law Major brain, and a knack for jumping to outlandish conclusions that always turned out to be somehow correct.

But George couldn’t just stand outside, in the cold, in a T-shirt, for the rest of the morning. So, with a hand over his eyes he walked into hell, gently opening the door and tip toeing in.

“Dude, what the fuck do you do?”

If George had jumped any higher, he would have had ceiling plaster in his hair. Alex sat cross-legged on his bed, lamp on, textbook splayed across the blanket in front of him.

“Huh?” was all George could muster, frozen in place like a pathetic cat that had gotten the lights flipped on it.

“Every morning you sneak in like some fucking amateur *Oceans 11* character. Where the fuck do you go at night, man?”

“Why are you awake?”

“Exams, dumbass? I have to make up a bunch,” Alex scoffed and looked to George, “You’re evading. Where do you go at night?”

“I’m not evading,” George mumbled, slipping past the bathroom door, closing it like it would shield him.

The rest of the morning passed in a blur of deflection and denial, noon rolling in to save George with an impromptu group scavenger hunt. According to Eret and Fundy, the map of the lodge wielded promise of an indoor pool, vaguely marked in the area of the main building. Upon casually mentioning this to the group, Tommy and Tubbo had practically phased through the floor, decided they were *going* to find it, and decided to make that everyone else’s problem.

So, here they were, marching down a hotel hallway like a group of teenagers you would cross the street to avoid, soundtracked by Quackity and Wilbur chanting the *Pirates of the Caribbean* theme song.

By the time the ornamental carpet thinned out, leading to a thin glass door, George was getting pretty jealous of Jack Sparrow's ability to walk the plank. Tommy's legs had actually *revved up* like some sort of 90's cartoon character, before him and Tubbo were gone and the aforementioned door was slamming shut with enough force to make George worry the glass might shatter.

So, they had found the pool.

The room itself greatly opposed the *Winter Lodge* aesthetic; concrete floors, tiled walls, and completely unlit, save for the luminescent LEDs in the floor of the pool. George found himself dropping into a squat at the edge of the pool and raking his fingers through the water. It was surprisingly warm, although that was just a good business move considering where they were. George hadn't actually *been* swimming in far too long, and the smell of the chlorine filled his nose, clearing a fog in his head that he didn't even know was there. It smelled awful, of course, but it smelled like home. It smelled like childhood, like playing mermaids and getting water in your nose, like sputtering after you tried to do a handstand.

And then there was a firm hand on the back of his t-shirt, the floor was falling from beneath him, and the first thing he felt was *cold*, a violent chill striking every nerve in his body with one foul swoop.

It took George far too long to realize that he had been shoved into the pool, but when he did, he emerged from the water with a newfound fury. His ears cleared first, the watery silence plunged into loud laughter, echoing through the empty room. Then his eyes cleared, burning slightly from the chlorine, and he was met with a screeching Quackity, practically doubled over, looking exceedingly pleased with himself.

"Alex what the *fuck*,"

The water crashed around him, shoving its way through the thin fabric of his t-shirt, running from his soaked hair into his eyes.

"Why the fuck would you do that," he sputtered, wading towards the metal ladder.

"Yeah, *Alex*, why would you do that," Karl snickered through hysterical laughter, elbowing Quackity in the side accusingly.

Alex whipped around and raised his eyebrow at Karl, an unspoken 'Are you sure about that?', to which Karl just reiterated, "That was a dick move, *Alex*."

Before George could blink any more chlorine out of his eyes, Karl's yelp echoed off the walls, blind fingers somehow finding purchase in the fabric of Quackity's hoodie. And, in a blur of flailing limbs and an atomic splash, both boys were plunging into the water.

The first sound to follow their cannonball, aside from the animated whoops and yells of the others, was a vehement "*I am going to kill you, Quackity*," followed immediately by another violent splash. Luckily for George, him and his bogged down clothes had made it to the ladder, so he sluggishly climbed the slippery metal, collapsing on the floor like a suicidal beached whale. Karl and Quackity continued to toe the line between play fighting and trying to drown each other, George more focused on how the fuck he would dry off his clothes.

He couldn't walk around a Minnesota hotel in soaked clothes, let alone walk back to his cabin to get new ones. The last thing *anyone* would want on their senior trip is catching a vicious cold from some stupid prank. He had to dry his clothes as much as possible, and looking from his soaked shirt to the frozen landscape just outside, he came to the grim conclusion that he'd need to wring the fabric out.

George looked to *all of his friends*, most of which stood around him, looking down at the poor drowned boy on the ground with incredibly amused eyes, some locked on the still going water brawl. He sighed, wobbled to his feet, leaving drops of water in his trail, and reluctantly hooked his fingers under the hem of his shirt.

"Are you taking your shirt off," Clay was leaning casually against a tacky beach table, hidden fond amusement weaved through his words, invisible to everyone but them.

George sighed again, "How else do you expect me to dry off? It's fucking freezing out there." He looked to Clay, who was standing with the rest of the group, eyebrow cocked in a message *only for him*. A competitive rush weaved up his spine at knowing Clay doubted him, and George pulled off his soaked shirt.

A wave of chill air that hit his bare skin, and he didn't even have to look to know that Clay was probably failing to suppress one of his stupid smug smirks.

"Damn, Gogy," Wilbur, who'd apparently noticed that George was shirtless, cooed jokingly.

George aired out his shirt, ducking back to avoid the splash, and twisted it between his hands.

"What is *that* supposed to mean," he scoffed, watching the water gather in the grout between the tiles.

Wilbur chuckled again, throwing his hands up defensively, humming in the tone of 'I don't know, you tell me!'.

All of the boys, *especially* Wilbur, did this all the time. It was this running joke, they'd flirt with each other, because it's not like any of them were *actually gay*, so it didn't matter right? George had to admit, though, it *was* fun. He loved seeing how far he could push his friends before they bashfully hid their face in their arms and tapped out. They were always pushing it, always going further with the jokes, like a platonically homoerotic game of chicken. And George *was not* a chicken.

"Are you calling me *hot*, Wilbur Soot?" he raised his eyebrows, fronting coy surprise.

From behind him, Karl vaguely yelled something, quickly devolving into more of a gurgle. Fundy snorted, and Wilbur over-dramatically ran a hand down his chin and bit his lip.

"What if I was," he retorted and tried to wink, the gesture falling flat as it turned into a very aggressive blink.

George stifled a giggle, putting on his game face and cocking his head, "Wow, Wilbur," he cooed, voice satirically silky, "I had no idea you felt this way."

"Did you just try to fucking *drown* me?!" Alex suddenly bellowed, sputtering as he held onto the pool ladder like a lifeline.

"You tried to drown me first, asshole," Karl screeched, his sweatshirt billowing into a parachute under the water.

“And I’ll fucking *do it again*,” was the last thing George heard before he decided this wasn’t *really* his fight, pulled on his uncomfortably damp t-shirt, and slipped back out the glass door.

The third night was a strange in-between, the visits having become too consistent to be flukes, but not long term enough to be a routine. Of course, they both *knew* George was coming. They hadn’t been caught thus far, which had provided a sense of reckless confidence. Besides, they were George and Clay; they knew *plenty* about sneaking around. Sneaking around was their area of expertise, it was the thing they’d been doing consistently for over four years now. And they *lived* for the thrill of it, for the blanketed privacy it had given them, for the mischief in just *barely* scraping by undiscovered.

George was familiar with the cabin at this point, rapping his knuckles on the door almost routinely as he suppressed a shiver.

“So is this a thing now,” Clay asked, pulling George in by the arm, “This is our thing we’re doing?”

George’s lips turned up as he ran his hand over Clay’s shoulder, “I missed you,” he justified, shrugging lightly.

“You couldn’t go two weeks without me, huh,” Clay murmured, eyes drifting languidly to soft lips.

“Like you ever could without me.”

Clay hummed, “You sure seemed like you had other options today, though.”

George’s brows furrowed, his hand pausing its movements on thin fabric.

“Hey,” Clay smirked, leaning in until his top lip barely brushed against George’s, voice dropping to a whisper. His breath singed the hairs on the back of George’s neck, “Why don’t you go sneak out to Wilbur?”

Unspoken words buzzed fervently in the stagnant air, the entire room holding its breath so as not to disturb the game they were playing. George’s eyes went dark as he caught on, lip catching between his teeth in a small smile, “Why, can you not handle it?”

Huffing a sharply saccharine chuckle against George’s lips, Clay squeezed at his hips in some sort of small warning, letting him know he was *tiptoeing the line*.

George nonchalantly pulled back, eyes glistening devilishly, “Because I can go if you can’t-”

“Okay,” Clay jeered, shoving George backwards, cutting the smaller man off as his back landed on the bed. The cotton of the sheets scraped against his skin, cold breeze seeping between his ribs, “If that’s how you want to play, pretty boy.” George smiled breathlessly up at him, unprepared for the way his eyes blazed. He pulled lips down to meet his, the blaze overflowing into his chest. When they kissed it always yielded the same feeling, the conviction that they were *connected* by something, that the way they moved in sync, the way they were always on the same page, couldn’t be natural. That there was some celestial string tied between them, pulsing their thoughts together,

making them match like puzzle pieces, like their lips and bodies were designed to fit each other.

Clay pulled out of the kiss, trailing down, leaving soft pecks in his wake. His lips burned, every inch of skin they touched buzzing in anticipation. George inhaled sharply when Clay gently bit down, hands flying up to grip his torso. It had taken the aforementioned a while to put together just how sensitive George's neck was, but he hadn't stopped using it to his advantage since he did.

He smirked against soft skin before latching on vehemently, immediately drunk off the feeling of George squirming underneath him, hands tightening around his waist.

"Is this what you wanted," the taller breathed sharply, "You wanted to tease me so I would get jealous? So I would make sure everyone knows you're mine?"

George couldn't offer anything more than a breathy gasp in response, mind completely clouded over, smoke seeping into every corner, unable to think of *anything* but Clay. Clay's mouth on him, the sharp sting of Clay biting at his neck, Clay's voice scraping beautifully against his ears. He dissolved into soft gasps and clenched fists, his stomach churning feverishly as he felt the string between them tighten, no closeness *close enough*, melting blissfully under Clay's scorching touch.

George had, at this point, pretty much memorized the porch of his cabin; which floorboards creak, the speed at which to turn the doorknob so it didn't creak. He was learning as he went, adapting to the newfound struggles of having to hide his relationship while *living* with all of his friends. So, the next morning, he'd rushed out of Clay's door a little later than he would've liked, practically ran the familiar path to his cabin, and managed to make it to the front door just before the sun had fully risen.

He held his breath as he crept through the door, wincing at a small creak, and *really* wincing when a familiar voice cracked the icy surface of the silent morning.

"Every goddamn time," Quackity's words were slurred, voice low and incognizant. George, like he did *every goddamn time* without fail, completely froze where he was standing. Alex wearily looked up from his pillow, annoyed grumble falling pin-drop silent once he met George's eyes.

"Holy fuck."

"I was going on a walk," George started before being immediately cut off.

"No," Alex said, and only then did George notice how strangely wide his eyes were, how he was suddenly sitting up straight in bed, "Holy fuck."

George looked from Quackity to himself, inspecting his hands and looking behind him, unable to find anything shock-worthy, breathing a confused, "What?"

Alex leaned his hands together in a triangle and rested his head against it, breathing an *utterly exhausted* sigh. And then he began to laugh. He huffed sharply, which turned to a chuckle, and before George could even process it Alex was, in true Alex fashion, wheezing in a pile on his bed.

"Holy shit," he panted after a few seconds, trying and failing to collect himself, "So *that's* what

you've been doing every night."

George couldn't even get out a confused murmur before Quackity was breaking into another fit of gasps, "I never," he heaved out another laugh, "I never pinned you for that type of guy, George!"

George might as well have been fucking invisible at this point, completely and utterly lost as Quackity devolved into *another* fit of laughter.

"You," he cackled breathlessly, "You disappear every fucking night and you come back at like *six AM*," another wheeze devolved into a cough, "And I thought maybe you were like going to the hotel *library* or something, and then," at this he lost it, laughing so violently George was tempted to be concerned for his health, "And then you come back with-" he wheeze-coughed again, "*Oh my God*."

"What?" George snapped, voice pitching with confusion.

"George," Alex breathed, "George-" he wheezed *again*, "George what's on your-" he ran his hands over his face, taking a second to rub his temples before finally getting the words out, "What's on your neck, George?"

Shit.

At George's reaction, or lack thereof, Alex's eyes went saucer-wide, jumping out of bed and running to the door like it *wasn't* six AM.

"No," George frantically pulled a sweatshirt over his head and stumbled after Alex, almost falling flat on his face in the process, "Alex, get the fuck back here."

He just continued to speed-walk away from the house, feet leaving indignant snow clouds in their wake. George jogged after him as excited words drifting placidly back to George.

"Oh my *fucking God*," Alex threw his hands up, voice muffled through a layer of falling snow, "this is *the* most exciting thing that has ever happened to our class." George knew where he was going; Alex *lived* for other people's secrets, practically breathed causing chaos.

"Stop, Alex, wait," George huffed, reaching out like he could grab Alex by the sleeve and Men in Black him.

"Who is it," Alex raved, breath a smokey gray in the winter air, "Is it that hot receptionist? I bet it's the hot receptionist. *Damn*, George, you're a player!" George was well aware that the Quackity train had long left the station, chaotic gears far past the point of stopping.

"Karl is going to *flip his shit*," Alex gasped, clapping his hands together giddily and whooping like a seal on crack. George finally caught up right as Alex yanked open the hotel door, speeding through the lobby and earning a *look* from the reception desk. George managed to grab Alex by the arm just in front of the lounge door, eyebrows flying up in a silent plea. He could vaguely hear familiar voices behind the door, something about a 'polar plunge', something about a lake. George waved his hand in front of his neck in a frantic '*stop*', proving fruitless as Alex barged through the door.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," he boomed gleefully in his *announcement voice*, the bustling room falling silent and looking to the door.

"Fuck do you want, *Quackity*," Wilbur quipped from the couch.

George didn't even need to scan the room to know that *everyone* was there. The room smelled of firewood, yellow lights cascading over the familiar sofa and tables. He knew they'd all be there. God, did he love his friends, but they traveled like a Pre-K class hooked on one of those hoop leashes. Acted like it, too.

"No, no, no," Quackity held his hands in front of his chest, outstretched like he was bracing himself, "You want to hear this one."

Karl threw a piece of popcorn in the air and missed his mouth, "Yeah, but that's what you *always* say."

"Karl. Karl, Karl, Karl. If this doesn't blow your *tiny little mind*, I will," Alex waved his hands around frantically, "I will give you my beanie." He scanned the room, arching his eyebrows.

"Okay," he continued, rubbing his hands together, "*George* over here," he paused for dramatic effect. George knew he'd lost at this point, that all he could do was watch, that the unstoppable force that was Quackity having met the *very* moveable object that was George's dignity.

"George is sleeping with someone," Alex blurted, immediately cutting himself off with a crazed cackle and clapping fit. George dropped his head into his hands and tried to sink into the floor.

"What?"

"No, no, no, you don't understand," Quackity beamed, "George is having a *secret affair* with someone in the lodge."

George looked to where Clay sat, cheeks tomato red, met with furrowed eyebrows and a silent question. George just let his eyes go wide with panic, gave a frantic mental shrug and hoped Clay got the message.

"And you know this *how*," Fundy murmured from where he leaned against the mantle.

"Show them your neck, Georgie," Alex sang far too gleefully.

George looked around the room, to the crackling fireplace, to the crowded couch, to the waiting faces of his friends, and all he could do was meekly shake his head.

Chaos ensued; absolutely *nothing* could be more exciting to a group of college students than each other's sex lives. Especially to this friend group, and *especially* with George, who was by far the tamest of the group. George, who had somehow gotten a reputation as the *academic*, the exception to the rule that was their lawlessly chaotic friend group.

"*Oh good heavens*" Karl shrieked, running to Quackity and flapping his hands excitedly. Alex sputtered something along the lines of "I know, I know," and hopped in tandem with Karl.

"I think it's the hot receptionist," Alex announced through heavy breaths, and George felt a wave of relief wash over him. They didn't know.

"There's no *way* he could pull her," Tommy interjected, sitting on the carpet with a look of crazed excitement.

"She's the only girl *here*," Alex screeched, and George found himself holding in a burst of laughter.

"Yeah, George," Clay murmured, hints of relief weaved into his words, "Is it the hot receptionist?"

And he had that smug fucking grin, because he always did. Because Clay, with his stupid green eyes and his dumb smile, lived off of taunting George, off of the little looks and the tiny lilt in his sentences that only he could decipher. And yeah, that stupid fucking smirk was irrefutably hot, but right now George wanted nothing more than to *throttle* his stupid, handsome fucking boyfriend.

Clay just smiled, like he could read George's mind, because he probably could, and mouthed a gentle 'see you tonight' against the cacophonous outrage that engulfed the room.

Clay lay listlessly against white sheets, chest heaving, basking in the comedown. George, sat beside him running a hand through his tousled hair, could feel the heat radiating off of Clay's body. He could feel the air relax around them, the way the entire room seemed to rearrange itself to fit them, settling peacefully in the aftermath of adrenaline they'd thrown it into. He could feel the sheets stir below him, small wrinkles rising to morph around his skin, fluctuating with every micro-movement.

Abruptly, Clay sat up, shifting his feet to touch the floor and standing, rupturing the calm cotton trails.

George looked up expectedly, to which Clay just reached out his hand, skin incandescent in the darkness of the night. George shot a curious look, and Clay just wiggled his fingers encouragingly. He pulled, rousing George from the bed, setting him on his feet and ignoring the confused glance he got in return.

"Get dressed," he chirped, eyes gleaming.

"What?" George's went hoarse for a second, raspy from use, as more confusion donned over him.

"Get dressed." Clay repeated, as though it was obvious, before plucking a pair of sweatpants from the floor and pulling them on. George could tell his boyfriend was determined on this one, so he just sighed and followed suit.

"Let's go," The blonde nodded casually towards the door. George offered another pointed look of confusion, unmoving from his stance by the bed.

Clay reached his hand out again, beckoning expectedly.

"Fine," George conceded, letting himself be tugged out the door into the freezing cold. Clay *immediately* took off running, arms angled childishly beside him.

"What the fuck are you doing," George whisper-yelled, scanning nervously to make sure no cabin lights were on.

Clay turned around for a split second, calling "Come on," far too loudly for George's liking.

George's mouth fell open, about to protest, before he realized the boy had already started running again. He sighed in surrender, stepped off the porch, and ran after the blur of blonde that promptly disappeared behind a corner.

The snow soaked through his socks, white flurries catching on the strands of his hair, his feet flying beneath him. The cold air lashed at his cheeks, gliding exhilaratingly by his skin. The cabins turned to a white-tinted blur, the world swiveled around him rapidly, air moving just to fit him. Cold seeped into his ribs and set him ablaze. He could barely see a flash of a white T-shirt. He giggled breathlessly, tasting frost on the back of his teeth.

“Clay,” George gasped incredulously, unable to keep from smiling, “I don’t have shoes on!”

“Neither do I!”

George’s feet were numb, cheeks bright red, and he couldn’t stop the giddiness that flooded his stomach. He giggled elatedly, breaths cold as they fell from his lips in short spurts.

George watched as the lights blurred, as the stars turned to unsteady streaks. He liked the thought that they were like him, that the stars weren’t blurring, but running desperately, chasing after each other just as he was Clay. He wondered if they had liberation in the sky; if the stars knew how free he felt, if they felt the same. He hoped they did. He’d feel bad for them if they didn’t. He hoped that they caught up to each other. He hoped that the racing stars, hundreds of thousands of miles away, knew the same love he felt. They glimmered brightly, streaking the darkness with light. It was almost like they knew he was looking, like they shone only for the two of them. He wondered if, from all the way up there, him and Clay shone too.

Clay approached the main building, a looming silhouette encompassed in dark blue. George watched curiously as he fished something out of his pocket, and leaned to a metal door on the side of the hotel. After a few seconds of fidgeting, the door swung open, and Clay gingerly pumped his fist beside him in celebration.

“Hurry up,” he ushered desperately, disappearing behind the door, giving George no time to consider what they were *actually* doing.

The two boys sped through dark hallways, out of breath and and heedless. Their feet left damp marks on the rough hotel carpet, their arms flailed as they stumbled blindly, almost slamming into each other when Clay skidded to a stop in front of a thin glass door.

“Oh my god,” George scoffed, “Of course you did.”

Clay chuckled and pulled open the door, Taking George’s wrist in his hand and pulling him into the room.

The room was completely dark, save for the LEDS at the bottom of the pool. The water projecting shadows onto the walls, enveloping the entire room in dark blue. The pool almost glowed, thin mirages flickering in tandem with the small tides.

“C’mon,” Clay’s hand was outstretched gently, voice suddenly soft and delicate, only for George to hear.

George chuckled softly and slid his hand into Clay’s, thin fingers immediately overpowered by tan skin. Together, they waded down the steps, water melting around their feet, somehow warm in the aftermath of their snow-clad race. In one swift movement Clay lunged forward, gliding far too gracefully, blonde hair akin to satin under the water.

George watched as he swam across the pool, coming up at the other end with a gleeful smile. His eyes sparkled, and George could almost hear them beckoning, whispering soft “Come on!”’s. With a gulp of air, he pushed his feet against the tiled wall and let his head slip under the water.

The first thing he felt was *cold*, the comparative warmth having worn off, leaving the water almost numbing. It was the kind of cold that, sure, felt fucking awful, but somehow made you infinitely more alive than you were before. George's normal reaction would be to regret everything and get the fuck out of that pool, but tonight was different. The cold surrounded him like a forcefield, encompassed him like a blanket. He felt it seep into his skin, push past all his barriers and course through his veins, and it was almost like he wasn't awake before now. It was almost like the cold had invaded every corner of his brain, forcing the fog to clear, forcing everything to clear. He was awake now.

The top of his head collided gently with nylon, and he reluctantly raised it from the water, meeting freckled skin and realizing he'd swam directly into Clay's leg.

"Hi," Clay chuckled, reaching an arm down to where George floated.

Taking the offered hand, George somewhat sheepishly stood up and landed directly in front of the other boy, close enough to feel shallow breaths against his forehead.

"Hi."

"It's really pretty, isn't it," the blonde mumbled, looking away to scan the room curiously.

"Yeah," George breathed as a drop of water fell from his hair to the pool with an almost inaudible *plonk*.

"It's been weird," Clay continued, "We've never had to hide it quite like this before."

George hummed, absentmindedly running his hand through the tiny waves. Clay glanced down and swept George's hand into his, pulling it out of the water.

"Are you okay?"

George slowly looked up. The pool light bounced off Clay's face, shadowing his cheeks in deep blue.

"Do you remember," George started, meeting Clay's eyes, "the first time we kissed?" It wasn't really a question, he knew the answer, more a way of giving the blonde a door to his introspection.

"Of course."

"We had these," George paused to search for the word, eyes unmoving from Clay's, 'bracelets. These plastic bracelets."

"They glowed," Clay offered.

"They did. It's one of the first, like, strong memories I have of you. Glowing bracelets."

Clay chuckled gently, whispered, "That's the first time I really saw you," His eyes flickered softly, following the thoughts behind them, "up close. Like I do now. Your face was all green."

"Yours was blue," George breathed, "it was super dark in the closet, and everything was glowing this dark blue."

Their eyes broke as Clay glanced around the room, returning with an amused smile.

"Yeah?"

“Yeah,” George slipped his hand from Clay’s, opting instead to slide the arm over his shoulders.

“It was *almost* like this,” Clay remarked, tilting his eyebrow teasingly.

George hummed in agreement and chuckled quietly, earning another raised eyebrow, arched in a silent ‘what is it?’.

“Except this time we’re not in a closet.”

Clay giggled, fading into a comfortable silence.

“Maybe we shouldn’t be,” George murmured.

“What, in a closet?”

George met Clay’s eyes again, unspoken words flowing through the gaze.

“Yeah,” Clay concurred after a few seconds, “maybe we shouldn’t be.”

The silent water rippled around them with a gentle slosh. George intently flickered over Clay’s eyes for a second longer, trying to read them. Gentle lips turned up in a tender smile, fingers moving to rub small circles into George’s waist.

“I love you,” he reassured, voice velvety in a way it only was on those words, in a way only George got to hear.

George smiled, the way he only did around Clay, the only he got to see.

And their lips met. Cold seeped through their veins, water flowing at their waists, leaving them stumbling blindly through hotel hallways and feverishly sneaking down dirt paths, smudged in deep blues and desperate touches.

It was early the next morning when it happened. When George, before setting off on his morning journey, stopped just outside the doorway to let a calloused hand rest on his cheek. He smiled into familiar lips, huffing a contented breath. Clay broke away only to bring their foreheads together, fingers carding through George’s hair, soft breaths feathering each other’s cheeks.

“See you later,” George whispered against Clay’s lips, leaning in for one last peck before turning around and hearing the door shut gently behind him.

The snow crunched under his shoes as he stepped off the porch, squinting gently at the familiar blinding light of a winter morning. He took a breath of the cold air, and was about to set off when his eyes wandered to the dock across from Clay’s cabin, and he froze completely.

On the dock, no less than 20 feet away from where he stood, was a group of familiar faces, a cluster of wide eyes pointed /directly/ at him. They sat in a circle on the dock, overlooking the small lake that ran across the lodge’s landscape. And they were *all* staring at him, mouths open in wordless surprise, shocked into a stunned silence. And George could only stare back at them.

After a few seconds of intense eye contact; the physical representation of *Spiderman pointing at*

Spiderman, George just glanced over his shoulder and called a shaky “Clay?”

And then Clay was walking out to him, responding a casual ‘what?’, before *also* freezing.

George felt gentle wind ripple the fabric of his t-shirt, scraping against his skin with a sharp chill.

“Well,” Clay muttered, head unmoving, “we said it was time, didn’t we?”

“Are you sure?”

George looked up, brown eyes meeting green, which just nodded wordlessly.

“Okay,” George breathed and shoved his hand into Clay’s.

George inhaled the feeling of Clay’s skin against his, of the immediate calm he brought, and, together, they walked towards the dock.

“What are you guys doing here,” was the first thing that came out of George’s mouth, unable to stop himself from a *little bit* of bitterness.

Sapnap’s mouth opened, then closed, and then whispered a nervous “Polar plunge.”

“That is *not* the point here,” Tubbo scoffed, ever the bravest of the group.

Clay sighed and lowered himself onto the dock, sitting with the group, “Yeah.” George followed suit and hesitantly sat next to Clay.

The air sat stagnant under heavy silence, wind rustling the trees surrounding them, the entire morning waiting with baited breath.

“I guess this wasn’t really,” he huffed nervously, “the best way for you guys to find out.”

Waves collided gently with wooden stilts, filling the silence with small splashes and quiet hums.

“Wait, wait, wait,” Alex finally came to life, stammering, “you guys are dating? Like dating? Like you,” he pointed resolutely at George, “and *you*,” He turned to face Clay, “are *dating*.”

Chill condensation rose from the lake with the morning air, brushing past their cheeks, falling calmly over them as George looked from face to face.

“Yeah.”

“Oh my God,” Alex looked blankly to the distance, words flat, before jumping up from where he was sitting, “*Oh my God!* That’s who you were sneaking out to? *Holy shit*, I should’ve known. Oh my *God*,”

And that was all it took to shatter the fragile silence, to turn the shock to excitement, and *everyone* was talking at once, asking questions and squealing and saying some things that George wasn’t even sure *were English*. Giddy words bounced off the surface of the water and melted into the air, gentle voices sinking into the snow, soft smiles carving their marks into the rough wood.

“So,” Tubbo clarified, “you want us to *jump into* the lake. In December. In Minnesota. In our clothes.”

“That’s what a polar plunge *is*, Tubbo,” Wilbur shrugged, stretching as he rose to his feet on the dock.

“*Are you insane*,” Tommy frowned.

“On three.”

George’s toes hung off the edge of the dock, damp wind running through his hair as he lined up next to his friends.

“One,”

He looked down and saw where the sun met the lake, glinting soft shapes and whispered promises across his watery reflection.

“Two,”

He felt a hand fall over his, the touch flying up his arms, sending a shiver down his spine. Cold mixed with adrenaline, buzzing incessantly under his skin. He took the hand in his.

“Three.”

The first thing he felt was *cold*. *Cold* shoving its way past his thin skin, crowding his veins, buzzing between his ribs.

And he was freezing. And it flooded his head, forcing the fog to clear, forcing everything to clear, and he realized that he *was never awake* before now. He waded through burning cold and rough water, blindly found a familiar hand, and latched on like it was the only thing keeping him from floating offshore. He latched on like it was the only thing that understood him, like it *was* the cold that forced him alive.

Somewhere, through the other’s shocked screeches and the furious waves, he found soft skin, skin he *knew*, and he was kissing freezing lips like it was all he’d ever known,

And all he could see was the deep blue of the water, smudged behind his eyelids. All he could hear was the scandalized whistles of his stupid friends, and he decided, then and there, with Clay’s lips locked on his, that it *was* a good thing.

Standing waist deep in a freezing lake, holding Clay in front of everyone, George felt it all combust between their lips, and decided that he was home.

End Notes

the end:)

ALSO thank u's to my love izzy, who beta read this and called out my shitty grammar, and

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also elle errorgeo for having a funny accent

normally i would have some class but ive lost all dignity. i worked so hard on this little shit.
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